GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:1723
ANSWERED ON:10.12.2008
DECREASING POPULATION OF OTTERS
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Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the otters are on the verge of extinction;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor;

(c) the population of otters in the country;

(d) whether otters are being poached;

(e) if so, the details thereof and action taken in this regard; and

(f) the steps taken to protect the otters and to increase their population?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS(SHRI S. REGUPATHY)

(a) & (b) The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in their Red List, 2008 has included the Smooth-coated otter (Lutrogale perpicillata) and Oriental small-clawed otter (Aonyx cinerea) as 'vulnerable' while the common otter (Lutra lutra) has been included in the category of 'near threatened'.However, there are no reports indicating that the otters are on the verge of extinction in India. The main threats to the population of otters are loss of wetland habitats due to reclamation of wetlands for settlements & agriculture, reduction in prey base, poaching and contamination of waterways by pesticides.

(c) No systematic national level population estimation of otters have been carried out in the country.

(d) &(e) As per the information available, 32 otter skins have been seized in Panipat on 24-10-2007 by the Wildlife officials of Haryana in which 8 persons were arrested.Poaching of otters is done mostly for their skin. The State/Union Territories take legal action in such cases as per the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

(f) The steps taken to protect otters and to increase their population are as given below:

i) Otters have been included in Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, thereby according them full protection.

ii) Hunting and commercial exploitation of otters is banned under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

iii) Important habitats of otters, including wetlands have been declared as Protected Areas.

iv) Financial and technical assistance is extended to the State/ UT Governments under the various Centrally Sponsored Schemes, viz, 'Development of National Parks & Sanctuaries', 'Project Tiger' and 'Project Elephant' for the consrvation of wildlife including otters.

v) The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau has been established for combating illegal trade in wildlife and its products.